

COMMUNITY RELATIONS OFFICE

The Community Relations Office, located in the historic Five Chimneys House, serves as the communications center for the Town of Blacksburg. This past year the Community Relations Office was renamed the Community Relations Office to be more reflective of the combination of community relations and communications services being provided. The service divisions provided by the Community Relations Office include; website development, media and community relations, town service promotions; community access television through WTOB Channel 2, and cultural outreach and services including the Blacksburg Museum.

This past year, the Community Relations Office continued to respond to the needs of the community and to search for new and improved means of communicating with our citizens. Through an innovative partnership with Tele-works Incorporated, Blacksburg Alert continued to thrive as the Town's newest public and emergency notification system. After a very successful launch of the system, Blacksburg Alert continues to grow by approximately 100 new registrants per month/

Awards and Recognition

In fiscal year 2003-2004 the Community Relations Office submitted the About Town newsletter for the 3CMA (City County Communications and Marketing Association) Savvy Award competition. About Town received the second place Silver Circle Award.

At the end of the 2003-2004 fiscal year Blacksburg Alert was submitted to 3CMA for the Savvy Award competition and in September of the 2004-2005 fiscal year was awarded first place in the Technology Services category.

Blacksburg Alert was also submitted to Government Executive magazine for their 2004 Grace Hopper Technology Leadership Award. At the time of this award, the Town had been informed that we were a finalist for the award.

Community Branding and Advertising

This past fiscal year the Town of Blacksburg continued to work with Richmond based communications consultants, the Bergman Group, local freelance designers Meg Nugent and Walter Hearn, and professional photographers Rick Griffiths and Glen Comeau.

The Community Relations Office continued to work with Meg Nugent to produce the About Town newsletter and distribute it on the web and in print to over 17,000 addresses. Due to budget restraints we continued to produce the About Town in black and white to provide a more economical means of distributing news to the community. The web continues to serve as an extensively used resource for town-wide communications.

Meg Nugent also began working with Blacksburg Transit on preliminary drafts of a new BT logo. She also designed a logo for Blacksburg Recycling and for the new Blacksburg Flower and Garden festival.

The Community Relations Office worked with Walter Hearn and local photographer Rick Griffiths to produce the 2004 Historic Buildings of Blacksburg Calendar. These calendars continue to be very popular in the community and are frequently requested for holiday gifts.

In terms of Advertising, the Town worked with the Bergman Group to produce a full color full page advertisement for the Virginia Tech Football Program with the goal of encouraging Virginia Tech

football fans to patronize our many restaurants and shops and to take advantage of the many recreational opportunities available to them. The Town also placed an ad in the Virginia Municipal League Annual Conference Publication recognizing Blacksburg as an outstanding place to live, vacation, and do business. A two page spread was produced for Landmark Publications for a hotel book that was distributed to all of the major hotel rooms in the New River Valley and a two page spread was produced for the Montgomery County Chamber book.

Additionally, the Community Relations Office worked with the Bergman Group to design and install Blacksburg Alert advertisements for the back of the Blacksburg Transit buses, as well as a variety of Blacksburg Alert advertisements to be used in Town publications. The Bergman Group also designed the Blacksburg Transit Route schedules, bus cards, and a number of other BT marketing materials, in addition to downtown welcome and seasonal banners for the Town.

Media Relations and Promotionals

The Community Relations Manager worked closely with local, state, and national media outlets on many high profile projects and in situations requiring issues management. In situations of crisis or issues management the Community Relations Office assembled an outstanding response team made up of the Town's Executive Management Team, and applicable staff.

Some of the media relations issues over the past year and a half involved

- The Toms Creek Sewer Project
- South Main Street medians near Colony Park
- The Solar Haus Investigation
- Issues regarding the Airport's Runway Protection Zone
- Town notification procedures
- Fire Code and Fraternities

The Community Relations Manager began working with the Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager, Mayor and Vice Mayor to arrange for quarterly meetings with Roanoke Times writers and editors. The purpose of the meetings is to discuss issues and pitch stories of interest.

Over the past year, the Community Relations Manager also published a number of articles related to Blacksburg Alert. These pieces have appeared in the Innovation Groups magazine, 3CMA publication, Virginia Town and City Magazine and Virginia Review Magazine.

Web Development

- John McKenna, the Town's Web Administrator began work with Anderson and Associates and the Town's web team to redesign the Blacksburg Transit website
- Completely redesigned the egovernment page to include links for conducting business with the Town, as well as links to other state and federal resources
- Posted Citizen Survey results to the web
- Began posting documentation for Council Meetings into the online Council agenda. Subsequently sent notices through Blacksburg Alert encouraging people to use the site.

Public Relations Team

The Public Relations Team completed Town Council's strategic goal of developing a Media Relations Guide. This guide was finished, presented to all departments, and posted on the employee intranet. Professional media training will occur in fiscal year 2005.

Last fiscal year the Public Relations team began working on a visitors package and video with Channel 2 Station Manager, Derley Aguilar. They also began working on presentation templates for the large number of field trips and Town presentations to school groups. The team also provided preliminary input and assistance for the Statewide Neighborhood Conference that was hosted by the Town of Blacksburg.

Facilities

Blacksburg Public Works crews began interior improvements to the Five Chimneys House including refinishing wood floors, painting, and installation of storm windows. Crews also painted the trim on the house and arranged for a new copper roof to be installed. In the next fiscal year, outside improvements, including construction of a new front porch will begin.

Additionally, the Alexander Black House was secured in its new location, in preparation for restoration planning to begin.

Other

- The Community Relations Manager worked with the Executive Management team to craft a new mission for the Town of Blacksburg
- The Community Relations Manager and the Executive Management Team designed a curriculum for the first Citizens Leadership Institute and carried out a successful program in its inaugural year.
- At Town Council's request conducted a public notification procedures audit.
- Hosted a number of tours for school children and international students, as well as a Russian Delegation through the local Rotary Club.
- Compiled a new Council member orientation packet and gave department overview to new members.
- Worked with freelance designer Melanie Rice to design new poses for the recycling raccoons.
- Assisted the Downtown Merchants Association with the Campaign for Main promotions
 - Arranged for a photo opportunity for the Downtown Merchants and assisted with material and public service announcement production.
- The Community Relations Manager continued to work with the Assistant Town Manager and the Blacksburg Partnership on retail recruitment efforts.
 - Attended the International Council of Shopping Centers national conference in Las Vegas
 - Served on the Blacksburg Partnership Marketing Committee

WTOB CHANNEL 2 COMMUNITY ACCESS TELEVISION

As part of the Community Relations Office, one of the primary goals of WTOB Channel 2 is to increase awareness of services and events in the Town of Blacksburg. In the past year, WTOB

implemented a variety of approaches in sharing useful information to residents in a manner that is timely and interesting.

Perhaps the most noticeable change with WTOB is the bulletin board system. A new system was installed in the fall of 2003. This system, called the MediaXtreme, allows staff to update announcements more quickly and efficiently, in addition to having more versatility with design.

Government communications can easily be displayed on thousands of televisions in a matter of seconds, and users of the bulletin board service can easily request a page on the screen via an online form. Viewers will also note that with this new technology it's easy to see what the current weather readings are at the airport in Blacksburg.

From Sept. 15, 2003 to June 30, 2004 WTOB posted nearly 400 government and community related announcements.

In addition, WTOB's government access programming saw an increase from years past. Our programming now covers Montgomery County government. With assistance from Montgomery County's TV/Media Specialist, the County Board of Supervisors Meetings are now taped and re-aired on WTOB on Thursdays at 8:00pm and Saturdays at 3:00pm.

The Station Manager has also worked out an agreement with the Virginia Tech Communications Department for studio sharing and an internship/volunteer program.

WTOB continues to produce all live Town Council and Planning Commission meetings.

In the last fiscal year WTOB staff produced a few special full-length programs to create awareness of town government services and events, includes the following:

- *Benches in Bloom* highlighted the bench-painting project the Parks and Recreation Department developed for the first Annual Flower and Garden Festival.
- *Homeland Security for Main Street USA* touted the latest technological service the Town offered to citizens, Blacksburg Alert, a public information and notification service. In this presentation, Blacksburg Alert was unveiled to viewers and viewers were also instructed on how to sign up for notifications.
- *BT Access Public Hearings* regularly aired live on the channel so that viewers unable to attend the hearings could call or email with questions or comments. (BT Access is Blacksburg Transit's paratransit bus service.)
- *Historic Lecture Series* was developed by the Blacksburg Museum and Historic Smithfield. Guest speakers included Dr. James I. Robertson (Civil War Historian) and Catherine Dean (APVA).

Regularly produced shows topics included:

Blacksburg Newsline

- Blacksburg Partnership
- Campaign for Main
- Blacksburg Museum
- Citizens Survey
- Blacksburg Alert
- Online Payments

Kid Town USA

- Water Safety
- Blacksburg Parks and Recreation Activities
- Fine Arts
- Natural Resources

Senior Living

- Senior Olympics
- Special on Alzheimer's Disease
- Regular Medical Segment with a Local Doctor

WTOB producers worked with town departments to highlight a variety of events and services, publicizing them in short form with brief promotional spots:

- Blacksburg Transit
 - Drivers Wanted
- Parks and Recreation:
 - Winter Wonderland Holiday Parade
 - Flower and Garden Festival
 - Independence Day Activities
- Planning and Engineering
 - Citizen's Planning Day
 - Neighborhood Enhancement Program
- Police
 - Vacation House Checks
- Public Works
 - E-Recycling Event

Other Items of Note

Also this year, WTOB established a summer volunteer/internship program, resulting in the production of *Par for the Course*, a program videotaped at the Hill Municipal Golf Course. Half the crew participating in the project was either a volunteer or an intern.

History on the Move: the Alexander Black House was submitted to the Beacon Awards in the category of Best Specialty Video. The documentary was a finalist in this category.

Equipment that was not being used was given to the Blacksburg Police Department for its use.

WTOB held its first promotional event with *WTOB Night* at Blacksburg High School's first home football game of the season. Fans were given the opportunity to learn more about Channel 2 and its services as well as pick up a few promotional items including a Video CD (VCD) about Channel 2 and pompoms with days and times of BHS football game replays. The Community Relations Office also ran a number of radio spots on WFNR during the football season.